Transcription of the Round Table instituting/fleeing

Andrea Caroline Keppler
Friederike Landau
Ferdiansyah Thajib
Elsa Guily
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt
"sharing/learning" audience/participants

The round table *instituting/fleeing* addresses collective practices as forms of resistance against power asymmetries – as activist strategies. It focuses on the entangled dynamics between fleeing and occupying the institution and the role institutional critique plays in these dynamics. We will map out our different collective practices by posing questions, such as: How can we understand the different ways the institution and the collectives are linked? How to create collectives within the institution? How can collectives flee or occupy the institution? Who can flee and where to? How do institutions appropriate and destroy collective structures?

Transcription of the Round Table and Participatory Discussion *instituting/fleeing*

With
Andrea Caroline Keppler (curator) / District * School without Center
Friederike Landau (urban sociologist, political theorist)
Ferdiansyah Thajib (researcher, community educator) / Caring for Conflict & KUNCI

Moderated by
Elsa Guily and Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

In English

On 28.06.2019

During the symposium *sharing/learning: methods of the collective in art, research and activism* by the DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste" in cooperation with / at District * School without Center

Editors' note: This text is a transcription of an audio recording of a symposium, which took place over one year ago, and which was not conceived to be published in this form – although the decision to document the event was made beforehand. The arrangement of the audio documentation privileges the spoken word. Since the recording device was plugged into the mixing console, the microphones functioned simultaneously as an amplifying and a recording system. Thus, the microphones not only decisively co-shaped the proceedings of that very event, but also its remains. In this way the technical apparatus conditioned how the event was (not) captured and provided a scale for closeness-distance.

In order to make this transcription more easily accessible for a reading mode that is akin to languages of the written word, we have made some

adjustments to grammar and syntax. However we decided to maintain the speaking tone by leaving in colloquialisms, as well as referencing recorded actions in the space (which we have marked in italics and square parenthesis). The time stamps appearing in the text give a sense of the duration of events, and the moments in which persons speak at the same time. In order to preserve the safety and the closeness, which developed during the symposium, we have anonymized the audience/participants and omitted some references in comments or presentations.

Fig. 1.
Preparing the session
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste"

#00:01:15-4#

Elsa Guily (Elsa): Hello everybody, let's start with the round table. I'm pleased that we are all together here today. Verena and I are both co-organizing this symposium and completing PhDs at the Graduiertenkolleg "Wissen der Künste".
The round table *instituting/fleeing* addresses collective practices as forms of resistance against power asymmetries - as activist strategies. It focuses on the entangled dynamics between fleeing and occupying the institution and the role institutional critique plays in these dynamics. We will map out our different collective practices by posing questions, such as: How can we understand the different ways the institution and the collectives are linked? How to create collectives within the institution? How can collectives flee or occupy the institution? Who can flee and where to? How do institutions appropriate and destroy collective structures? And so on. For that purpose we have invited three guests Andrea Caroline Keppler from District Berlin, who talked already this morning, as well as Ferdi Thajib and Frederieke Landau to our round table. As we decided together, I will let each of you present yourselves and begin by addressing the question "how do you relate to collective practices in relation to the institution?" So maybe, Ferdi you want to start to introduce yourself?

#00:03:16-3#

Ferdiansyah Thajib (Ferdi): Hello everyone and also thank you and Verena for the invitation. My name is Ferdi Thajib and… yeah… collective… So, there are quite a few collectives and institutions that I am involved in. Maybe it's good to just name some to put it out there.

The first one is the KUNCI, which is a research collective in Indonesia that has been around. This year it turns 20 years. I only joined in 2007, which is still quite a long time; 12 years or more. That's one. KUNCI is a collective in practice, and on paper it is a foundation, so it's also an institution in a way.

The second one is (I'm also part of the current) we call it, committee without center, [*laughter*] center committee without center [*laughter ends*]. Starting this year - because District also is experiencing a kind of transformation. And I entered the processes as part of the restructuring team, let's say.

And the third one, I'm also part of, is the university; I am still a PhD student at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the FU Berlin.

The fourth one is part of this coordinating team for a Global South network of arts - 25 arts and cultural organizations called the "Arts Collaboratory". Until there: four.

But with regards to the question of how collectives matter in my daily practices, well basically I breathe through collectivity. I couldn't remember the time when I worked as a solo or an individual. I am always trying to push for, even if it's for writing, always trying to push for more collaborative processes than just on an individual basis. But also, it is difficult with regards to, for instance, doing university work. Because as a PhD researcher, although I do work with community as a part of the research, still the kind of authority, is really kind of like, given to me as an individual rather than… and also, I will be kind of like… the degree or the system only recognizes individual achievements rather than collective achievements that's one.

But for the most part I try to be… for me it's much more of a second nature to work within teams or within a larger collectivity, because it has been a way of surviving, back in Indonesia. Due to almost non existing infrastructure and support, we have to work together in order to produce knowledges and share them. But of course, moving here to Berlin is another way of thinking about collectivity, because - I can share more of this when we have the discussion - but, it's not always easy to form collectivity in a context where… not so much because of the difference of culture or political situation, but it's just that the need sometimes gets overshadowed by larger constraints within the existing structures that exist here in Berlin or in this local setting. Maybe I will stop there.

#00:08:26-6#

Friederike Landau (Friederike): Hi everybody. So, as I'm not an artist, I'm an academic, my experience with a collective practice is already within the context of an institution. So I work collectively in teaching or in co-authorship of articles. But I think that's a very different scope of action to enable collectivity. So, generally in comparison to collaborative artistic practice. I think from my work in my dissertation - I was researching emerging modes of collectivities, or how do new political actors come into being? In my PhD, I looked at the emergence of a group called "Koalition der Freien Szene - The coalition of the independent scene" which is a Berlin-based trans-disciplinary platform of action consisting of all sorts of independent cultural producers (from jazz, performing arts, visual arts, poetry, dance…) that come together in a conflictual collectivity, consisting of very heterogeneous elements that have different resources, that have different spatial needs in the city, that have different visibilities in the city. And what I'm interested in, with regards to collectivity, is their potential to open new spaces for conflict; to think of collectivity not as the harmonious unitary mass, but rather as a set of different positions, different agencies within a collectivity, that can then strive towards formulating a position against institutions. So that's one take on collectivity. But then, what interests me is also the politics of the institutions or the institutionalization of collectivity towards an institution. So: how, from different elements and different voices, do you come to the point where new institutions come into being? Institutions that challenge older institutions that are occupying the field and are not open to certain voices? So I think my buzz words are: institutionalization of

collectivity, making new institutions; and the importance of conflict in institution-making.

#00:10:51-9#

Andrea Caroline Keppler (Andrea): Many thanks also from my side. We are very pleased to host the symposium and that we can take part in it. My name is Andrea Keppler. As Ferdi I am part of the artistic directorship collective of District * School without Center. District itself is in the process of reframing at the moment, and maybe I'll tell a little bit why this is happening. I've been working here since 2014, together with Suza [Husse] and Nino [Halka], in this constellation, who cannot be here today. We've been working together, and had the desire to change our working methods, or to have other working structures. I would not describe District as an institution, but there were and are institutional structures that are inscribed in District and in us which were also produced via our organizational form, a gGmbH. What we had was an artistic directorship and a project manager, and later project based positions for the coordination of cultural education, press and communication (Johanna Ekenhorst) as well as accounting (Anneli Schütz). So the desire came up to change *our* working structures in which we were not satisfied because they did not correspond to our needs, capacities and wishes about how we wanted to work with each other. And also we wanted to integrate associate artists, curators and activists but also other people involved in the District circles, I would say, to have them be more part of a team. We started thinking about how this could be possible, and ended up with the idea of collectivization and to transform District into an association (Verein), as an essential part of the reframing of District. That's the main process we are in at the moment. And also, searching, how is it possible to work in a collective way, together… If you imagine having a collective organizational form, there will always be hierarchies in it… So, that's something we are just working on at the moment.
I've worked in institutions before, and have had experiences in other collective forms, like urban garden projects, which also bring, like, frustrating moments, I would say. Right now, we are super optimistic to change this kind of "institutional" context here at District, but we are also in a mood of searching, and looking for how this can happen.

#00:14:00-3#

Verena Melgarejo Weinandt (Verena): Hello… okay. So, what I will present briefly is the method that we invented collectively. We had pre-meetings and we decided together that we would try to visualize a collective thinking process, and with my few technical skills I hope that this works… So, we decided that we would take these two poles, on the one hand the institution, and on the other hand the collective. We are not so much thinking of them as separate. I just put them here separately, so we could put things around, on top, beneath… We thought about them as something that overlaps also, and that cannot be put into oppositions…
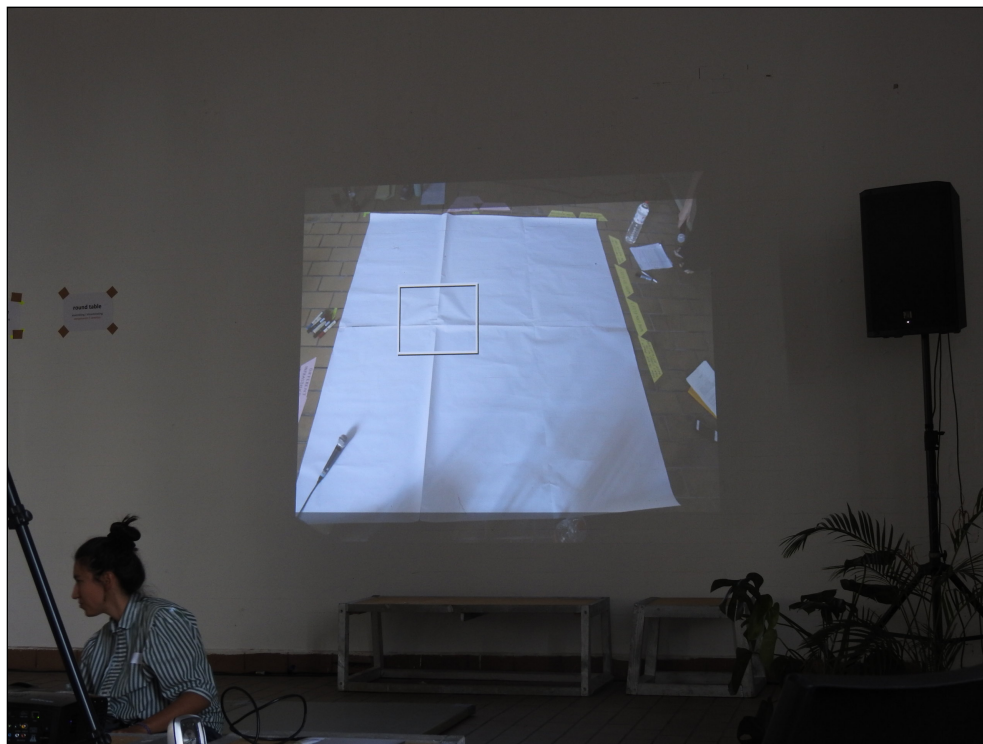
Fig. 2.
Verena Melgarejo Weinandt with mapping projection
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen
der Künste"

And then we collected a set of non-finished keywords – so this is just
the beginning and we hope to go on about this. Some of the keywords we
found in our discussion that we have to think about, if we want to think
about these connections, are: time, power, critique in general, and
institutional critique specifically – I'm not going to explain every term
now because this is what we're going to engage in in our collective
discussion,– we also have the body… ([*Aside*]: Maybe, Elena, can I give
them to you? So I don't have to jump around? Thanks)… commodification,
and knowledge.
So, the idea was that through this visual map we will try to share, to
visualize, but also relate all our knowledges together. And something we
have also decided on collectively is that we do not want to prioritize
one kind of knowledge. So we try to think about experiences, feelings and
also theoretical reflection, every kind of knowledge that comes up if you
think about your relationship to the institution and the collective,
everything is valid. I will go on about this later.
So, we have different categories: one is the keyword that I just
presented… [*Aside*] Maybe we put them on the top somewhere… Then we
thought that we have to talk about the dynamics between these different
keywords, in relation to 'collective' and 'institution'. Then we thought
a lot about our own experiences… We raised a lot of questions, which we
think are fundamental, and yeah, then I have a symbolic 'other' for
everything else that needs to be included. [*Aside*] We just put that here…
So, what we ask you to do, as the audience, is to participate in our
visualizing process: you find little piles around you – there should be
one close to you, in different colors. Whenever you feel you want to
participate – and we'll really try to do it without a list for the
beginning – you can use one of the cards. If it helps you to categorize
your thoughts in one of the color schemes that we thought of, you're
invited to do so. If this doesn't work for you that is totally fine,
also. I will give you a couple of minutes now to think about your own
relationship, your own experiences, your own knowledge, in relation to
'institution' and 'the collective', and then, you could engage in the
visual mapping by, for example, filling in dynamics between the different
keywords. We specifically ask you to think about your experiences; and
you could locate them, you don't have to locate them. You can also think
of another word: if you think our vocabulary is not enough or you have

another word for some of the terms, you could also change this, or add
it. You can change the positions of the words if you feel like it. You
can draw - we have pencils - so you can put different relations to it.
That's if you want to engage, you don't necessarily have to comment on
it. So, if you have something that you think you want to put on, you can
just show it and just read out what you wrote down and put it down.
And what I also would like you to think of is that, it is a very common
thing to take notes in a talk, but you can also think of this as
collectivizing your notes - that you usually take for yourself, and then
you take them home with you - so, maybe there's a word from your notes
that you would like to share with us, and I hope you don't judge yourself
too much. [*Laughter*]

#00:20:35-9#

Elsa: Maybe what we can have also is… the idea of this symposium is to
engage in a collective practice, all together. Not only to be a
representative of some collective practice. That can also be a start. But
your experience can be based on how you have lived this situation today,
how the workshop was, for the workshop was supposed to bring you together
and have a sense of collectiveness somehow. So, experience can be based
on today's symposium.

#00:21:12-8#

Verena: Do you want to add anything? No, okay. So, I will give you a
couple of minutes, maybe three? Okay.

#00:21:30-6#

Elsa: In German a good expression is 'in sich gehen', so, maybe everyone
kann in sich gehen.

#00:21:43-4#

Audience member: Could you please repeat, what we are supposed to do?

#00:22:03-5#

[*Movement in the space*]

Verena: You can engage with the keywords and draw down your expressions
as it relates to this sort of constructed difference between
'institution' and 'collective'. So, whatever comes to your mind. Whatever
you think of. Brainstorming in the widest sense.

#00:22:23-9#

Verena: You're also very much welcome to come and join us and sit with
us. There is a lot of space around us.

#00:22:26-5#

Friederike: … or ask questions.

#00:22:30-1#

Elsa: If you don't feel like standing and coming in front, you can also
raise your hand and we come to you and get your flipchart.

#00:22:53-3#

Ferdi: Equality.

#00:22:55-5#

Elsa: Equality is always something a bit blurry, right?

#00:22:59-8#

Ferdi: I just tried to recall when we had this exercise at the beginning,
it was one, two, three months ago, I think. I cannot remember it fully,
but I remember looking at these two themes, 'institution' and
'collective' as a kind of entry-point… Thinking about, not only, the

connection, but also the disruption between the two. And, I think the easiest place to start is from the experience. Then other things start to emerge in the conversation.

[*Unintelligible voice*]

I mean, I know… here we already have some words written in different colors around questions, but my initial understanding of this invitation was actually – at the beginning – … because the title is instituting and fleeing, as if the relationship between institution and collective is in opposition. That was my first impression. But then, my response to that impression was that, no, actually institution and collective can be the same sometimes, and at other times they can be different.
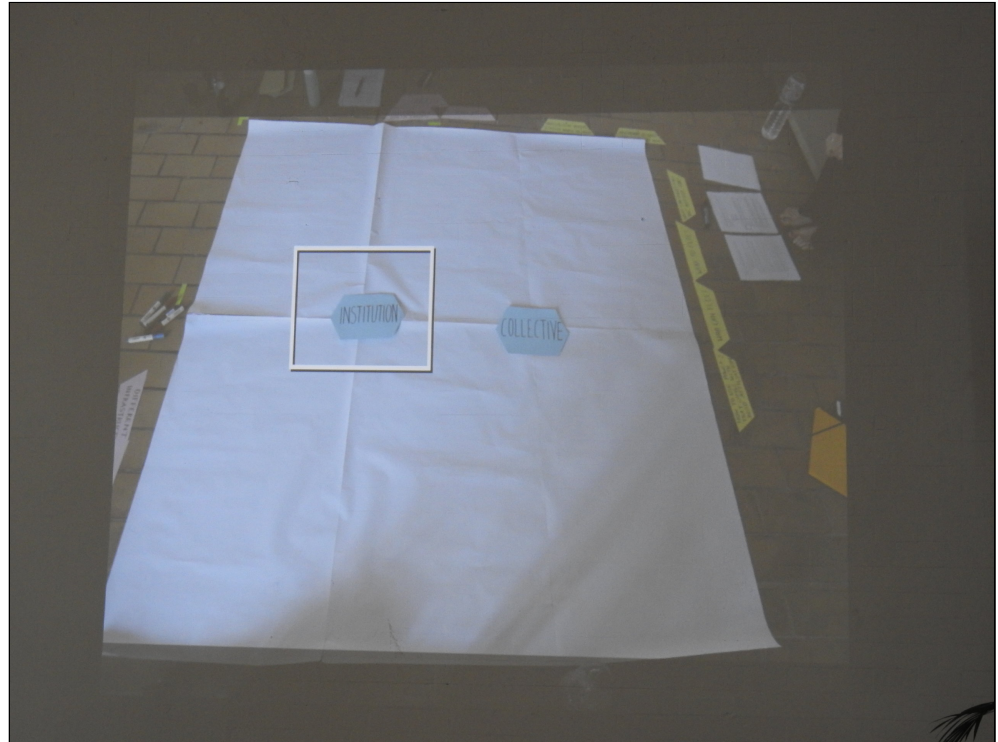

Fig. 3.
Mapping projection
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste"

#00:24:51-3#

Elsa: We will reflect on that.

#00:24:54-4#

Ferdi: Because what happened, as I told you in KUNCI, is that, for a while, we were a collective, which was informal, based on friendship, but then, because then we started to produce a lot of stuff, knowledge, an archive, and so on, suddenly, a funding body approached us and said that they wanted to support our activities. But then, in order to get that funding, we had to form this institution. And at the beginning we were kind of resistant to the idea, because we… In the Indonesian context there is this kind of dominant model of the NGOs, of thinking activism always in terms of non-governmental organizations, while we were more thinking of making it more fluent, because we're activists, but we are also writers, and we are also artists, but we are also… I mean, we don't want to be put into this activist box basically. And what happened was: we gave in to that invitation. We formed ourselves into an institution. We have a *Satzung*. We have this… We have a proper structure. And at some point I was the director of the institution, but actually it made us less excited about doing our work. Because, what happened is that, although having a structure is nice, it is clear – especially in dealing with external people – but also when it comes to the decision making process,

the responsibility sharing, and… it's a bit… it doesn't fit with our way of doing things.

So, in the middle of the process – actually it was around 2011 – we decided to change back to the way we were. So we erased all this – how do you call it? – structures of directorship, managerial, and then, we decided to work either all of us as directors, or all of us are members. And if there are things that we need to sign on paper, we do it in rotation. There's a director on paper, but there is no authoritative figure in the way we do things. Everything is always based on consensus. We are seven people so it's much easier, we are not talking about 50 people here. And it gets more complicated since, from the seven people, three of us now live abroad. That also changed the dynamic a lot.

#00:28:15-6#

Friederike: I think that relates to the question of what gets lost when you institutionalize and what do you gain when you turn into an institution. So, you were just talking about, you know, you have more access to resources and you become intelligible as something that can be addressed, and become a kind of new shell of identity for people to fit under. And at the same time, I thought it was very striking that you said it was less exciting, and then we have here, the keyword 'fun'. So here's the question of what mode of organization enables some kind of exciting practice, I guess…

#00:29:03-1#

Andrea: But the question is also when does it start to be an institution? Where are the borders or the limits? When does it start? And are we not already institutionalized in a way that we kind of have all these structures in us already? As for example our living and working conditions are always framed from different institutions around us, also.

#00:29:41-7#

Friederike: Yes. I think it's not so much about what an institution is, but more what you do that makes 'institution'. You know, if you organize, or if you try to come to a consensus in a certain way, that's not acknowledged or recognized by procedures or bureaucratic conundrums, that doesn't really matter, because that is just doing institution otherwise, or doing the practice of instituting otherwise.

#00:30:13-4#

Elsa: Does someone from the audience want to have a word about some of the keywords or dynamics that you put on the map?

#00:30:33-8#

Audience member: I didn't write anything down yet, but I've been thinking about if there is a difference in the collective and the institution, it has something to do with predeterminism. I think the institution has some kind of set up intention and goals. I work in a collective – or we call it a collective – and I have this desperate need to describe our intentions before we even begin anything. And that came in conflict with the other people's intentions in the collective. And to insure freedom for production, we ended up deliberately not using any words, not using any words at all. And we became this free space for collectivity. But, this has also resulted in a very unproductive state of affairs. And then there's this sort of counter plan, predetermined institutional hierarchy or goals, some kind of power distribution where somebody declares what the goals are, or consensus, where the majority declares it. So, I'm finding myself in an ideological conflict with the institution as something too predetermined, but also finding myself wanting to efficiently produce something with this group of amazing people. So, I'm also thinking about if we could brainstorm tools to create this: how do we produce this collective?

#00:32:05-4#

Friederike: That actually nicely links up with something that I was

thinking about after we had this wide open mapping to fill the individual keywords with meaning. So, basically, what you are addressing is also that question of power, right? What kind of power do you ascribe to or assume in the institution when you enter it, or when you engage with it. And I was thinking of this pair of terms that might help a little bit to describe it. I'm assuming that the name Chantal Mouffe is of current floating reference point, because Chantal Mouffe has worked on artistic activisms and agonistic artistic practices, but I was thinking that her deceased partner [Ernesto] Laclau had a very helpful tool to describe institutions, which is: the terms of sedimentation and dislocation. So, what you were saying, that institutions are kind of pre-made and predetermined, and maybe overdetermined, a place of rules and norms and things that are forbidden and done in a specific way, that kind of references to the concept that Laclau talked about, which is, the sedimentation of the layering of different structures of powers, different norms, different meanings. But what it is basically referring to is this sort of gradual construction, and this sort of building up and layering up of meanings that are technically contingent and that are technically not necessary. So that the institution, in an anthropological sense, doesn't really exist, there is no institution, we make it - right? And so, that's the kind of spatial thinking, of how does 'institution' come into being? And the counterpoint is the dislocation; the sort of, you know, unsettling and challenging and ungrounding and taking, uprooting from the ground. And I was thinking, maybe, when we think of institutions not as this sort of naturalized sedimented thing that is there and immutable and overwhelming, but, if we rather think of institutions like dislocations or places where dislocation and challenging of power and of representation modes can happen, maybe 'institution' becomes a bit more sexy. Well, it's sort of like, if something is located, it's kind of in a fixed place, and if you dislocate it, you take it out of its context and you unhinge it from where it is. So it has this logic of challenging and misplacing or reassessing of what it means…

#00:34:59-0#

Elsa: So, Friederike would you say that dislocation would be a synonym to fleeing? As in that question of where to flee or how to flee? Would it be to dislocate? Or to think the institution in dislocation, if I understand?

#00:35:16-4#

Friederike: Well, it probably goes towards this more emancipatory, and kind of fleeing moment. I think we had a really good question of where do we flee to, if we flee the institution? So what's the outside of the institution?

#00:35:30-6#

Elsa: And who can flee also?

#00:35:33-4#   #00:35:32-7#

Friederike: And who can flee, who is able to flee, who dares to flee? What's the prize of fleeing? What privileges or resources or contexts or communities do you lose? I haven't really thought about the connection between fleeing and dislocating, but I think the reason why I thought about this sedimentation and dislocation is, because it basically draws our attention to the absence of an ultimate rationality of why institutions exist. So, yes, if institutions become these big institutions with pre-existing systems of meaning and rules - what to do and what not to do, what to pay for and stuff like that. But, through this concept of dislocation, it becomes a bit more emancipatory, maybe accessible to be critiqued and to be made otherwise.

#00:36:31-4#

Andrea: And maybe - about the fleeing - we're also asking, who can flee and where to flee to? It also came up, maybe, to flee to new kinds of institutions, or create institutions by yourself. But then of course, you

have the same problems you were describing, similarly to what we are dealing with at the moment also at District.

#00:37:02-9#

Ferdi: I have a nice illustration. I'm going to read a quotation. It's in an article called "History, Praxis, and Change. Paulo Freire and the Politics of Literacy" and it's based on an interview or conversation. The interviewer asks Freire: "You have said that (quoting Freire) 'in a class-society the power elite necessarily determines what education will be, and therefore its objectives.' (The interviewer continues:) Richard Ohmann, and others have argued that the formal education system, in its response to illiteracy, teaches only those skills that will help support the military industrial complex. How can the progressive teacher oppose such forces while remaining within the system itself?" And Freire answers… [*Getting Up*] I need to move because this is the perfect answer, like… "Yes, this is exactly my case; for example, now I am the Secretary of Education of the city of São Paulo. It is really necessary to understand that we human beings are ambiguous beings. Reality makes us, from time to time, ambiguous, precisely because reality is also ambiguous. For example, a progressive teacher, a progressive thinker, a progressive politician many times has his or her left foot inside the system, the structures, and the right foot out of it. [*Continues reading while mimicking Freire's gestures as described in the text that he reads aloud*] Freire solidly plants his left foot to the one side and his right to the other. *Here* he or she has the present: *here,* he or she has the future. *Here* is actuality, the reality of today: *here* is utopia. This is why it's so difficult, experiencing this ambiguity, for us to walk: we have to walk like this." [*moves*]

#00:38:52-4#

Ferdi:[*Continues reading and mimicking*] "With a playful smile, Freire begins to waddle across the room. (Freire says:) Life is like this."

#00:38:57-2# [*Laughter*]

Ferdi: For me then, it is about this idea of what kind of fleeing is involved. That's one. Sometimes, I think, in certain contexts, in institutional work, it is kind of needed, in order to… because we are also working against a certain institutional enemy that can only speak in a language of institutions… But also, on the other hand, sometimes you feel the need to be outside of the institution in order to speak to this enemy in a different language.

#00:39:46-4#

Fig. 4.
Ferdi Thajib speaking (into the microphone)
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen
der Künste"

#00:39:48-0#

Verena: I think… one thing that came up in our discussion, that I really
liked, was the body as a fact that plays a role in this when-do-I-need-to-
flee and when-can-I-stay-and-occupy. And, maybe I can just read out the
post-its that are here. It's [*reading*] gender, race, color, sexual
identity. Does the person who wrote this would like to comment on why
this is put next to 'body'? Yes?

#00:40:18-5#

#00:40:24-9#

Audience member: I don't know, like, when I just see the 'body' as a
word, these are the first things that somehow come into my mind, that
affect the power structures as well I think. And for me, also, in an
institution or in a collective, a 'body' that brings all these gender,
sexual identity, race, color, etcetera, that affects very much your
position and the work that you do. Even, somehow, credibility and
reliability… I worked in a conservatory for seven years. I could tell,
from my experience, that this was a very open minded institution, but,
still, for example, with the work that I do compared to the work that a
white person does, and how much I have to convince and prove that I am
actually capable of doing that work. And I have to work maybe triple to
just kind of equalize the whole thing. Or get trust. And then, in that
sense, somehow, that I also lose focus as an individual. I would maybe
work better for the institution or the collective, but then I start to
worry: what if I am just doing something wrong, or I have to just do the
job perfectly for just a different purpose? I think, and I guess, that I,
being a person of color and gay, was just less convincing than just being
a white straight male. After my contract ended, two white straight males
were hired to do my job, basically. So that was my experience, but also,
I was thinking, how can we change this, and make it in a way better? And
then, there I guess, comes the work of educating white people; privilege
training etcetera etcetera. So, I guess that's why I just wanted to put
there all these parameters that affect your position and work, quality of
your work, your reliability, in an institution or in a collective.
Because I think collectives also have so many of those problems. They
have internalized all these institutional problems. Because people may
flee from the institution to a collective, but they've internalized many,
many problems. So, in that sense, I also experience this in collectives

as well. Because there always has to be a power structure, that also comes with their own knowledge for example: oh okay, I am a brown person, but actually I am a cis gendered gay, so this person is, I don't know, a transperson, so I should just give more privileges to this person so I just step back… So, I don't know… I guess I made my point.

#00:44:01-8#

#00:44:07-5#

Ferdi: Yes, maybe to connect with that directly, because your question was "what If I do something wrong", but my question is "what if I do something right". In a sense connecting to the keywords around 'commodification'. In terms of how sometimes our knowledge as persons of color helps in transforming the institution in a way that suits it, that fits it, that makes it appear better, but that actually doesn't change the situation.

[*Unintelligible words from the audience*]

Yes, yes. So, my question is then: how do you navigate between this question of performing right, in the right way or in the wrong way or in a good way or in a bad way. Actually also a critique toward the institution… I don't know how to name it in a short word…

#00:45:10-0#

#00:45:17-6#

Verena: I also think that maybe this is obvious, but the institutions usually are structured in a way that there cannot be really a collective of trans-people of color [*Laughter*] within the institution itself. So I think this brings another notion to what occupying and fleeing from a collective standpoint means, if the institution itself does not allow to have these collectives created within the university. And on the other hand, the experience of what happens, if you find someone you can relate to and maybe create collectives, this might be a big word, but maybe relations. And how much one other person can be of support. What I mean by this is also the weight of collectives, and the power that they can give also on a personal, emotional level, within the university fights or institutional fights.

#00:46:29-8#

#00:46:36-0#

Audience member: I'm thinking, I have always had pretty easy access to institutions as a sort of well-educated, cis, white man. And I haven't experienced here, something in relation with this word 'conflict' you were using earlier. Institutions somehow, because they declare some kind of rule-set for those of us who are invited in, you, sort of very demonstrably, want to indulge in conflict and that's a way that institutions actually exploit the labor of semi-marginalized people is by them creating conflicts, so that they can expand the institution. But when you then transpose that experience onto the collective, because the collective has a more secreted way of functioning, you feel uninvited to do conflict. Because something in your solidaric, non-hierarchical behavior makes you apologize for yourself all the time. I see that when I go into collective practices, I don't want to call out that there are some kind of power structures that make me feel unpleasant. And so somehow the conflict that expands institutions in one side is silenced in the other side. And I don't know exactly what my point about this is, but in the difference between institutions there is - because of the deliberate power structures - an invitation for constant conflict and that creates. And in the collective, now at least in my experience right now, we are almost compliantly silencing each other. And that creates consensus, but also creates nothing.

#00:48:32-6#

Audience member: Just in general, I am also interested in what do we mean

by institution, do we mean a university structure or is there a broader understanding? Because if it is a university structure, I thought about it when I wrote the question 'who has access to an institution?' So, it is a very limited structure and a very privileged structure usually; and a collective is a very open structure. And also, what do we mean by collective? Because grandmothers who watch a certain series also could form a collective, and they can meet each other and discuss and maybe even create their own and it will be a collective. So, in that case collective is a very open structure, pretty much to anyone, just depends what you want to do with it, and it's based on private, personal interests, compared to institutions. I've been out of institutions maybe for ten years, and thinking about maybe getting a PhD or even a Master degree – I have a Bachelor degree – is kind of terrifying because of all the things that you need to do and how you need to get involved with structure. But I can at any point form a collective or a group of people with the same interests. That's probably, for me, the two core differences between the two aspects.

#00:50:02-6#

#00:50:05-5#

Friederike: I mean, I'm guessing we are not going to come to a definition of what an institution is. I think what we were talking about, so that it also relates to the theme of the conference, we did limit it or situate it in conversation between art, research and activism. And I think the research part kind of points to the university, as an institution of power and / or solidarity and / or conflict. And also the collaboration between university and art collectives, or that potential for alliance building; because we had actually talked about the power that comes with being affiliated with an institution. So that you are recognized as somebody from a specific point in the game, and also deal with that power yourself. I thought it was really interesting, you were just pointing out the sort of, maybe, even self-censorship, I don't know, but at least this sort of internal silencing of collectives. But we were talking about what to do with power that you have when you can't get rid of it. I mean, yes you can leave the institution, but, that's a very important point, when you leave the institution, the institution will still stay. So the institution is basically left over to, worst case scenario, white male dudes, who are not interested in decolonial thought or in critiques of a coloniality / modernity nexus and stuff like that. So that if you leave, maybe somebody else is going to take your place and maybe make it worse. So, when we were talking about 'institution', being a university, and there is a sort of power that comes with it, how can we use this power to create other forms of knowledge and other forms of learning or un-learning privileges and stuff like that? … A friend of mine, who used to work for the cultural administration - so for the city, for the state – he was a curator before that, and he was always a bit ironic about his situation being now a public service worker. And he said he feels like he is the guy who lets the mice into the pantry: so he's the guy, who opens the door to people who can do way more crazy things and creative things than he can, because he sits at the desk and he allows, you know, what money gets to what kind of art production and stuff like that. But, I thought this image was really helpful; maybe we need some people in institutions who do whatever they can to engage with their own power.

#00:52:48-1#

#00:52:48-3#

Elsa: And I think the symposium team can jump on this. Because that's why we came up with the topic of collective, actually. And especially this round table of instituting and fleeing was exactly about this: about what do we do inside of the institution? How do we organize as a team, in a collective sense? Can we organize as a collective? Can a collective grow out of this experience? So it was supposed to rethink the structure in which we are all together as PhD and postdoctoral positions, and have access to multiple resources. And also the cooperation with District came to life because of this: how do we deal with this topic and our

experience of doing this symposium? We tried to work in a collective in a way, it had some failures, but I guess it had some positive outcomes. I mean, it is a mix also, I will say knowledge is not only about knowing and controlling what we know, but also to fail and to experience the limits in the power structure that we are in. So I don't know. Ferdi, you wanted to say something, or Julian… Andrea…
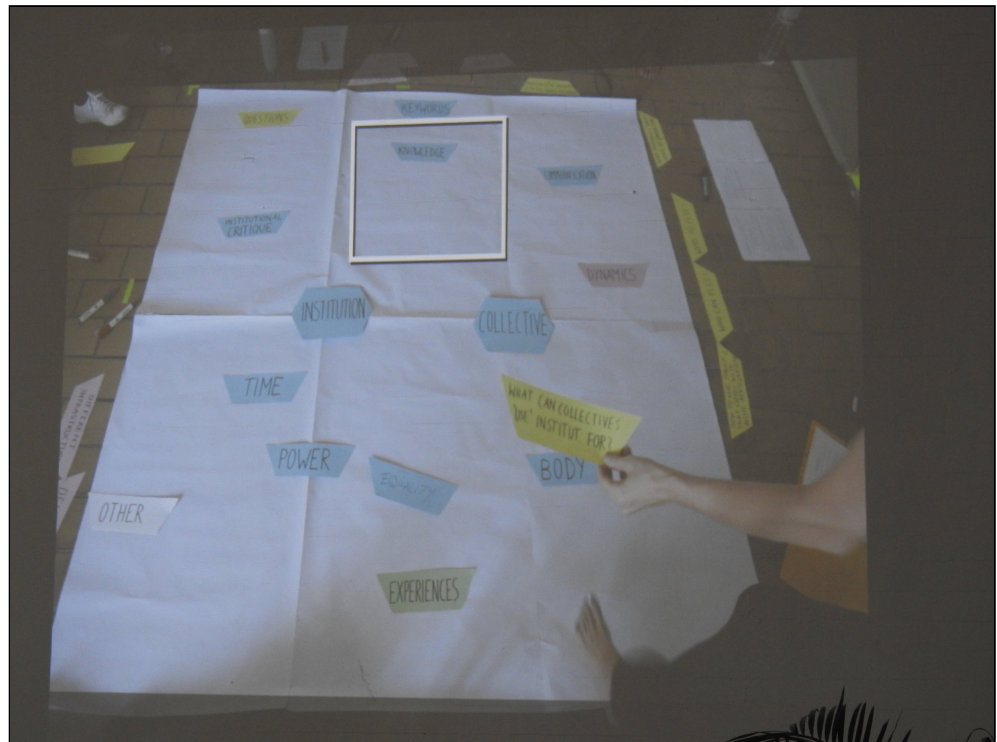
#00:54:24-8#

Fig. 5.
Mapping projection
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste"

#00:54:23-3#

Andrea: In a kind of different direction… I only wanted to add that also, as you already pointed out, it makes a big difference having the resources to pay everybody involved or having not, being in an institution, having a proper salary or not; it makes super different conditions working in a collective and being unpaid… and of course it might be easier if collective work is possible without money (unpaid), but we at District also understand our work as paid labor and it is also part of our policy that everyone is paid for their work.

#00:55:02-0#

#00:55:01-7#

Ferdi: One word or one keyword that somehow I encountered in these first months quite often was basic income and unconditional basic income. Can the person, who wrote this, please explain?

#00:55:22-7#

#00:55:32-7#

Audience member: I was thinking about creating a structure or an institution to have money to give this money to artists who are perhaps in a difficult situation in their life. So that they are free to work and to think and to live. And that they don't have to worry about how I will survive next month. I think that if we create a bigger base, so for a lot of people, to have this unconditional basic income in society, then we can get involved in other ways. Because, I think basically all human

beings are good, and everyone has his own meaning in life, and if you
don't have to think about how I'll survive, you can work on it, and then,
you can contribute to the common good, to the community. And I think the
sense of creating: For me, it was also about creating an institution, we
are working in a collective and perhaps we are also able to earn money
with our collective work, but the idea would be that we can change the
institutions. For me it's also the state; that we can change laws. That
we can create equality. And that we can ask other questions about why
someone is earning 200 or 500 Euros for one hour of intellectual work,
and others are working ten hours a day and doing really hard work? And I
think that unconditional basic income is really… it was an idea that
opened my mind.

#00:57:44-5#

#00:57:45-4#

#00:57:48-7#

Audience member: Hello, I'm also part of a collective and part of an
institution. And I was thinking about the relationship between these two
things. And for me they are quite complementary. So, the collective: we
started as a bunch of people who wanted to do something, and we started
to create an NGO, because we needed to get money, and you need to create
some kind of structure: define how we are working and all of that, what
you were talking about, and creating this institutionalization of the
collective to help certain things happen faster, to not just be this
limbo - that we really enjoy at the beginning, but then it's quite
frustrating if you keep on doing that for 20 hours a week for free. So,
to bring some components of the institution into the work of the
collective. And then, I am also working at a difficult institution, but
also there, I'm really lucky to be in a very good work collective, I
would say. I mean, yes, I have a boss, and I have a position somewhere
there, and there are some people who are tutors. But I would say that the
dynamics of the collective are working there, because, yes sure, my boss
has more responsibility and she is paid much more, but she also shares
the things she gets and the access she gets, and the power she has with
her position - she shares with us and we share it all together. So, I am
really happy in my institution actually, because we can help each other
to exist there. So, around the professor, we are a collective because we
really help each other to deal with the bureaucracy and to deal with all
the things we can. Even though people have radically different pays, but
I think that's also reasonable in that it comes with different
responsibilities, and I think that's fair. People have different
responsibilities. That's I think okay.

#01:00:14-1#

#01:00:16-5#

Andrea: That's maybe also a point which is already here: the question of
solidarity which can be found in institutions but is quite often missing.
And which is also my or our desire at District, to create a space where
there is solidarity for everybody… Working with pays, to be able to pay
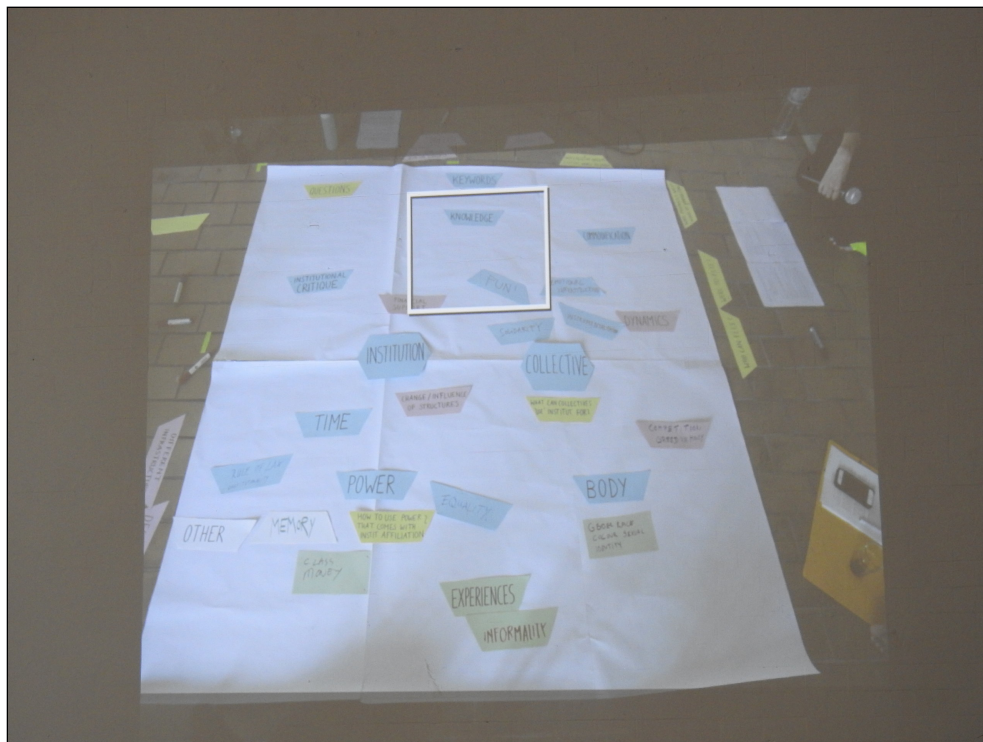everyone fairly and equally.

#01:00:48-7#

Fig. 6.
Mapping projection
Photo: Maximilian Haas. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste"

#01:00:50-3#

Elsa: I would add also that solidarity, in that sense, is also caring; understanding and caring. If someone needs to withdraw or to flee also the collective for a while, because there's a lot of energy and engagement also, it needs to be possible.

#01:01:11-6#

#01:01:10-2#

#01:01:11-0#

Friederike: The thing with 'solidarity' is also something that I was experiencing this week. So, I'm now working at Bauhaus University in Weimar and we have a PhD program, which is a practice based Phd for artistic research. So, there are artists writing PhD theses and then there are art historians, and media theorists and cultural theory people. And so it's a heterogeneous group and we had a very sort of striking experience this week after a lecture. The feedback about whether this lecture – which was on other kinds of knowledges and decolonial thought and the alliance between decolonial and artistic research – we had very different reactions about whether that was necessary or not, and it got really heated and aggressive. And I think, even though a lot of people were disturbed by this sort of violence that was coming up in this academic setting, and the way that people were practicing critique, I think it had a nice secondary effect of people more explicitly saying that they don't want this kind of environment in an institution. So obviously, it's a negative experience, but then the back firing effect was this longing for solidarity, and explicitly wanting to bring this in or requesting other modes of caring. So, I think the university also needs to be this place. I came across – when I was reading – I came across the term of institutional decay; this sort of slow decaying of the institution. I was thinking that it might be good, some institutions do have to die; like Trump's face outside that we just ate, [*referring to the previous workshop*] even though he is not in himself an institution. But some institutions do have to die. But this process of dismantling is very, very slow. So ,in the meantime we also need coping strategies: how

to keep dealing with institutions that are problematic? And I think
solidarity is a huge factor in that; to think about what kind of position
do you have in an institution and how to use it? Also, what kind of power
do people ascribe to you? Which you can then also play with. I'm usually
not a second wave feminist but in a sense I appreciate a strategic
centralism sometimes, where if somebody wants you to be part of a group,
which you don't necessary identify with, but you can leverage a new mode
of exhibition making, or giving a seminar, or putting together a
workshop, or a conference, I think so be it. So just be the kind of lame
old whatever-they-think-you-are to enable these different modes of making
institution.

#01:04:14-3#

#01:04:15-4#

Audience member: I would like to answer to this decaying institution;
we've ve been actually talking about different ways of doing
institutions, because this has happened in the '70s and especially in
architecture in Berlin. Then the architecture department was radically
transformed. And it was not because the institution was decaying, it was
more because the students were just really unhappy with the way
architecture was being practiced, completely detached from reality, and
not dealing with the real world. Just kind of making architecture for the
sake of architecture; modernist stuff. It was of course a part of the '68
movement and so this has't just happened by itself, right. It's part of a
wider movement in society. But it was transformed. And the institution,
the learning, the teaching radically changed; they were going much more
out, they were having a lot of live courses; there was from this time on
lots of really interesting academic, teaching stuff invented, like *Art
Plus*, if someone knows that magazine, it's still on until now. It started
as this kind of radical '70s magazine that now is an institution. Anybody
in architecture, if you haven't read *Art Plus* it's like: "what?". And it
still kept this kind of collective gathering of ideas, quite radical,
still involving new things. I think institutions actually can change, and
I mean now, TU Berlin architecture is not really radical and collective,
but that is what we were discussing in a symposium last year. Exactly
this: how can we give it a second push and transform it? And it was
interesting that, while in the '70s it was the students, now it was
actually the professors, who were sitting in there and being like: "Hey
let's do something, this it's boring." So, that is also quite
interesting: where does the push come from to transform the institutions?

#01:06:33-7#

#01:06:33-8#

Ferdi: Maybe in relation also to that, but also in relation to what
people said here related to the body, is about this residue of… Someone
said how institutional or certain institutional practices stick to our
body and then we bring them to the collective. But also, I'm trying to
think of it the other way around: sometimes our involvement in the
collective – maybe a professor used to be working in a commune somewhere
– brings that history into the institution. So there's not only a mixing
but also a clash of these different entities within the body. There's
this history that sticks in our body and then we bring it into the
institution and into the collective kind of situation.

#01:07:35-3#

#01:07:36-5#

Audience Member: She is actually still part of a collective even though
she is a professor. So there is this kind of, what helps her to keep
check with reality. And this is why I'm also part of a collective, to
keep checking with reality, while being at university, where it's quite
easy to shut yourself off and forget about the rest.

#01:07:55-2#

#01:07:56-0#

Audience member: Relating to this, I have been wondering: do we have to
have the paradigm 'institution' to be having this talk we are having
right now? Do we all have to have been in an institution - like school or
university - to rub against or step away? Are people who haven't been in
an institution allowed to do institutional critique? Or do they not even
have the, you know, don't even know "what you are talking about"? Genau.

I mean, there is still also this narrative of the institution as a very
desirable place to get to for many people. Really to get in there saves
their lives, you know. I felt a bit like we were jumping away from this,
or I don't know where this comes into the discussion.

Andrea: Yes, that's something where maybe I can go forward. I have
expectations written here… So, it's really also about the expectations
toward the institution. So, we as District are kind of in-between
collective process and institution. We are also struggling quite often,
as we have that big space, and the other spaces and our co-team, but
which brought expectations to us, which we could not deal with, as we are
kind of over worked ourselves, it was beyond our capacities. I think only
to link to what you said. I think it's also the questions are
'institutions' these desirable places? You think they have a lot money,
but they also have limited resources or they do not use the existing ones
well. There are also a lot of people in institutions who work under bad
conditions.

#01:10:40-5#

#01:10:42-9#

Friederike: I think that's a very exciting question to think about: life
without institutions. If it's even possible to think about that, because
institutions are not only this very solid brick building with regulated
opening hours. Institutions are also mental, intellectual and normative,
structuring the way in which we communicate with each other, or we engage
with each other maybe. So I don't know, I'm thinking out loud, if we can
imagine a sort of social organization without institutions… But the
question of 'how to speak about institutions without having had access to
one?' I think it's a point we can think about, but then also to think the
institution beyond that spatial, place-based kind of big thing to enter,
physically enter… And I had another point, which I thought was
interesting, what you said Ferdi, about leaving a trace in the
institutions once you've inhabited it for a while. That brings the time
component up again, or the life cycle of institutions. Some of them carry
such a long past and often also very complicated past. If you're thinking
about museums with collections that carry histories of violence,
exploitation and colonialism. And in that, I think it's also important to
bring the past back into the present of an institution, so that it's not
only leaving a personal mark, but it's also leaving a - hm? [*Inaudible
question in the room*] Yeah, it has this material marks, but also to mark
the marks, you know what I mean: to not overwrite them and forget them,
and only engage with this more presentist or, in a way, consumerist
present of the museum. But also to kind of unleash the haunted past that
institutions have, and to bring that to the fore and say: maybe we have a
past that has nothing to do with us personally but it does obviously. And
then you create all these new relations and all these new connections and
maybe alliances, to make the institution a place where everybody has a
stake. I think that is important: not to think of institutions as
exclusive buildings but as places that are in a way public and that are
in way owned by everybody.

#01:13:31-8#

#01:13:32-0#

Verena: I thought of an example when I heard your [*referring to audience
member*] question of who can do institutional critique? I studied at the
Academy of Fine Arts, and the first semester I studied there, the

university was occupied, and we occupied it for almost a year. There was really one semester without any normal curricula going on. It became a very big movement in Austria afterwards. And then it spread around Europe. We had, at that moment, a Rektorat, directorship, that was really conservative and applying economic structures and pressures on the institution… That was one of the first things that made this movement happen. And then some years later, there was a big refugee movement in Vienna specifically. They first occupied a church, the Votivkirche, and then they occupied the university, the Academy of Fine Arts. And during that transition the Direktorat had changed, the directorship: three women, who position themselves as feminist, who do decolonial curricula, and present or pose themselves as very critical leadership… but the refugees were kicked out after I think a couple of weeks that they occupied the academy. And they were not able to stay there. So, I think the question of 'who's able to do this critique, and who gets space in that?' And also, 'how institutions profit from institutional critique?' is a very relevant one…

#01:15:26-4#

#01:15:28-4#

Verena: Okay, I think the time is almost up. But I don't want to close directly because we also started a little bit later, so, are there any more remarks or comments you want to bring in?

#01:15:47-5#

#01:15:54-2#

Audience member: I wanted to say - because we were always talking about collective and I don't now, perhaps it's programmed and it's only a stupid question….- I was in a workshop two months ago, and the group was big, like this. And the man who was telling us about his residency project asked everybody to say one sentence, their name and what kind of interest brings the person to this meeting. And I was thinking about perhaps we could make a list, where everybody who wants to share his name and perhaps institution or his activities and his email address and who signs, allows with his signature that his address can be passed around. That was my question.

#01:17:03-1#

#01:17:03-5#

Verena: I think there is no one who will stop you from doing this. If this is a concern, we have several flipcharts and a lot of pencils, and I think everyone is invited to make proposals and put it up on the wall. Sure, you're free to do it.

#01:17:28-2#

#01:17:33-6#

Audience member: This is a good example. I was in four workshops in the last eight weeks, and in one they did it and in the others they didn't. And it was a good example, a little bit like an institution, because if there is someone who is getting this and who says "I will do this institutional part, administrative part" - and then you can create something. But if there is nobody, then it will get lost in the open space. So, I will start it, and go to everybody who wants to sign and I will send it.

#01:18:17-8#

#01:18:17-8#

Elsa: Also, if I follow well, what we could do is, we could have a big white sheet and put it on the wall and map it in this way, that everyone individually can get it anytime and write her name and a relation that can be an institution to work or the place where I live, to whatever you feel is nice to share. [*Unintelligible remarks from a person in the room*]

— But of course it's a really nice contribution. It's not only about mapping our ideas and questions, but it's also about mapping ourselves. So, not everyone can participate or feels like participating right now, I can understand, but that is a good way to continue this mapping.

#01:19:16-2#

#01:19:16-2#

Verena: I also think it brings up the question of what formats do institutions use to collectivize, so to say, and the conference or symposiums are the classical formats to do so. And to question this also, how does that really work? And who can really be part of this, so to say, of this collective that is constructed by these institutions? That brings this sort of reflection…

#01:19:44-2#

#01:19:44-2#

Ferdi: For me, just a bit of a side-note. It is interesting for me, that I have been to, I'm lucky enough, I'm privileged enough, to be in this kind of constellation quite often. Not only in Berlin, but also in different parts, like South Africa and Zagreb and so on. But I kind of sense the urgency, or the need - due to burn out, to neo-liberal precarity, to lots of things that are happening in a lot of different parts of the world at the same time - that the experience that comes into the center of the conversation, is not the same, but it's based on similar interests, and there are a lot of overlaps. And I don't know, and again, unfortunately, a lot of these constellations, they just happen at one time, and then they kind of disperse again. But it happens again somewhere. But maybe there is something in trying to organize around this, not just to make it this one-time event.

#01:21:03-0#

#01:21:03-7#

Friederike: And again thank you for your suggestion, because basically it brings up this question, who are we as a collective? Or if we are already part of the institution? That's the assumption of this classic text by Andrea Fraser about institutional critique, she says: it's not really about being against the institution, we are already the institution; and then asking about, what that means, if we are already the institution? So that basically sums it up. That if we are part of the institution and this 'being part of the institution' is something that we have all just participated in, brings up the question again, who is this 'we' that we are being part of.

#01:21:53-8#

#01:21:53-9#

Verena: And just to explain, as the part of the organization team of this conference, one decision was to almost try to invite only people from Berlin. So, on the one hand we tried to make this network locally, that usually - and then also because we didn't have all these costs of inviting speakers from far away and having to pay for flights, we were able to pay more to people who were participating in a talk, than usually this format allows. So, this is just an example… So you can all connect, because you are in Berlin and you don't have excuses… [*Laughter*]

Elsa and I had many things prepared in order to bring this like 'in Fahrt', to make this work, and we didn't use any of that. So for me this is a success, and thank you very much to our guests Andrea, Friederike and Ferdi who made this possible, and thank you very much to the audience also who engaged so actively.

#01:22:39-4#

#01:23:06-0#

#01:23:06-1#

Elsa: And also, we don't conclude. I mean, we don't come to a conclusion yet because it's too early. We have one more day. And because we are a bit anti-conclusion and anti-statement. And again, there is no stupid question, every question is a start to foster dialogue among each other. And I think it is through this dialogue that things will evolve. And that is why we've also chosen to privilege workshop as a format to encounter, and talk about all these questions and dynamics. So, I hope that tomorrow again, if you come by, that you will continue this discussion in smaller groups. And also, we will have a round table *commoning/communing*, and at the end tomorrow, we will have the *Club of Im_Possibilities*, which will be a moment with Nuray Demir in which we will actually create a sort of Zusammenfassung, reflection, whatever we call it. And just one more thing, also on the program we still have something on –

#01:24:23-4#

#01:24:23-5#

Verena [*interjecting*]: It's a reward for the ones who stayed till the end.

#01:24:25-7#

#01:24:26-7#

Elsa: The workshop *Cooking, Playing, Sharing*, prepared some food, and our dear guest Pêdra, who is an artist performer and visual anthropologist has now set up a buffet, and it would be really nice if some of you stay, and we can keep on talking more informally and get to know each other. I feel concerned because there are people involved in preparing this, and we have bought lots of food, so it would be really sad if everyone left and everything gets wasted. [*Laughter in the audience*] [*Laughing*] I don't want to put pressure, that's definitely not my style [*laughing*] but thank you very much. Thank you Andrea, thank you Friederike, Thank you Ferdi.

Fig. 7.
Keyword map
Photo: Verena Melgarejo Weinandt. Courtesy: DFG-Graduiertenkolleg "Das Wissen der Künste"